

Newsletter published by the SHIBA HelpLine Regional Managers, for time-sensitive health insurance news. Please pass the information on to others!

The latest headlines:**Centers for Medicaid & Medicare Services (CMS) releases contingency plan for Part D deadline:**

Part D plans must: 1) accept all mailed applications postmarked on or before May 15, and 2) consider any incomplete applications received by May 15 to be complete. Plans must also accept all beneficiary enrollment requests through midnight on May 15. CMS recommends that plans make sure to sufficiently staff their call centers, and provide adequate Web site capacity to meet the expected increase in call volume and Web traffic. For more information, read the CMS Tip Sheet "Drug Plan Enrollment Deadline" at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/partnerships/downloads/DrugPlanEnrollmentDeadline.pdf>

CMS clarifies Medicare Part D premium withholds from Social Security

checks: For clients who have their Part D premiums automatically deducted from their Social Security checks, it takes about two months after the plan notifies the Social Security Administration (SSA) for the deductions to start. As a result, in the first deduction, SSA withholds two monthly premiums. After that, they will deduct only one monthly premium payment. If a client's benefit is not enough to cover two months' premiums, plans will contact clients to arrange another method for paying. If clients are waiting for Social Security deductions to start, plans cannot disenroll them for non-payment of premiums. For questions, clients should contact their plan.

BenefitsCheckUp® launches new tool in June to complete and count online Part D Low Income Subsidy (LIS) applications:

Once folks complete an LIS application using the new tool, BenefitsCheckUp® will electronically submit it to SSA. The tool will let folks track the actual number of LIS applications submitted online and print a confirmation letter. BenefitsCheckUp® will also screen client LIS information for eligibility into several key federal benefit programs, without asking the client additional questions. To use BenefitsCheckUp®, visit <http://www.benefitscheckup.org/index.cfm?link=WSBCU> on the Web.

Gov. Gregoire launches commission to improve health care access: The Blue Ribbon Commission will recommend a sustainable five-year plan to improve access to affordable health care for all Washington state residents. The recommendations are due to the Governor and Legislature by Dec. 1, 2006. Commission members include two members from each of the four caucuses of the Legislature, and other state officials—including Insurance Commissioner Mike Kreidler.

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